TL 1068

East Timor : more pressure for a just solution

For Immediate Release: October 3, 1992
From the East Timor Action Network/USA

There will no U.S. military aid to Indonesia in Fiscal Year 1993!

In the late afternoon of Friday, October 2, a (US Congress) House-Senate Conference Committee deleted $2.3 million in International Military Education and Training (IMET) funding for Indonesia from the Foreign Aid appropriations bill to protest human rights violations in East Timor. The committee also adopted notification and approval requirements on economic aid to Indonesia. This is the final decision on this issue for this year, as the bill will be passed by both houses and signed by President Bush in a few days.

The cutoff of the only US military aid program for Indonesia came after a hard-fought battle, in which Indonesia enlisted members of the US military, State and Defense Departments, and major corporations to lobby for the program, which annually trains about 150 Indonesian military officers in the US. More than 2600 have been trained since Indonesia invaded and occupied East Timor in 1975.

Charles Scheiner, coordinator of the East Timor Action Network/US, called the decision "a major victory for the people of East Timor. By resisting pressure from business interests and the Suharto and Bush administrations, Congress has sent a strong message that the ground rules have changed," Scheiner said. "This is the first time in 17 years that Congress has cut aid to Indonesia over East Timor. The American people and government have opened their eyes to Indonesian killings of the East Timorese people, 200,000 of whom have been killed since the invasion. Sanctions will continue and escalate until Indonesia stops violating East Timorese human rights and allows the people there to determine their own political future."

In June, the House of Representatives unanimously approved an amendment to defund the IMET program. They also required that economic aid to Indonesia be approved by Congress. The issue was decided in three days, and pro-Indonesia forces did not make a serious effort to influence the vote. In the Senate, however, they had three months to lobby, and chose to make this a major issue. Business representatives told Congress that Jakarta had threatened to retaliate against US firms if aid was cut, and Senators were visited and called by cabinet officials and admirals. Lobbyists for General Electric, AT&T, Freeport-MacMoran, and McDonnell-Douglas, among others, went to work. The American-Indonesian Chamber of Commerce wrote its members that the bill "could substantially affect the level of economic assistance," and that it "may directly or indirectly impact US firms doing business in Indonesia."

The debate garnered network television coverage, an editorial in the *Wall Street Journal*, and widespread discussion. Senators heard from voters, as human rights, church, peace, and East Timor solidarity groups mounted an intense campaign. Although the grassroots groups couldn't match Jakarta's money and high-level contacts, they mobilized many Americans who had previously been inactive on East Timor.

On September 23, the Senate Appropriations Committee voted 15-12 to disallow IMET unless the State Department certified that certain conditions, proposed by Senator Daniel Inouye, were met. This was a defeat for East Timor, as the conditions were weak and did not require anything concrete. The Committee voted down a proposal by subcommittee chair Patrick Leahy that required Indonesia to permit human rights observers into East Timor and to list people killed and jailed during and after a massacre there last November 12, when Indonesian troops shot into a peaceful memorial procession, killing over 140.

When the House-Senate conference committee met, House subcommittee chair David Obey fought for a total suspension of IMET, joined by Representatives Matthew McHugh and John Edward Porter. Senator Leahy proposed conditions stronger than those narrowly rejected by the Senate Appropriations Committee, and was supported by Representative Mickey Edwards, ranking Republican on the House subcommittee. When Inouye and his supporters saw that they did not have the votes, they agreed to a total cutoff, expecting that Suharto would reject conditional aid as an insult to national pride. Legislators from both parties warned of further cuts if Indonesia did not move towards human rights and self-determination for East Timor.

By fighting so hard, Indonesia's supporters have magnified the importance of the final decision. As Jakarta begins to negotiate with Portugal over the future of East Timor, this will increase pressure on them to come to a just resolution.

UN Department of Public Information, 28 September 1992:

"The Foreign Ministers of Indonesia and Portugal met today at United Nations Headquarters with the Secretary-General at the latter's invitation. They agreed to resume the dialogue between the two Governments to search for a just, comprehensive and internationally acceptable solution to the question of East Timor under the Secretary-General's auspices.The dialogue will be a continuing process. The Foreign Ministers will meet regularly. Talks will also be held between the Permanent Representatives to the United Nations. In both cases, the Secretary-General will participate personally or through his designated representative.The Foreign Ministers will hold their first meeting with the Secretary-General in December."